

Celebrating Women in Manufacturing – Ontario Made Edition

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Engaging, Supporting, and Inspiring Women in Manufacturing

It has been proven that empowering women stimulates productivity and economic growth. However, in the manufacturing industry, women continue to constitute a clear minority. What can be done to change the perception about the manufacturing industry among girls, young women, and their families?

We had the opportunity to speak with six women-led and owned Ontario Made manufacturing companies to get their perspectives on a variety of topics. They all shared similar sentiments, such as the importance of mentorship, the vast opportunities that manufacturing has to offer, and how we need more women in the sector to share their transformative ideas and help companies grow.

Meet the Manufacturers




Natacha Rey
 Founder, Formulator & President
 Maison Apothecare

Maison Apothecare is an outward expression of everything that is important to Natacha: family, creativity, honesty, loyalty, and the planet. After two intense years of formulating, she struck liquid gold with the Lemon Aide Surface Cleaner. Eight years later, the Lemon Aide cleaning line has grown to include a full range of environmentally responsible and refillable products to clean every corner of your home.



Venise George
 Owner/Operator
 YAWDI's

Venise's entrepreneurial journey started to spend more time with her kids. YAWDI's lineup of condiments came about because of her passion for travelling and her desire to try food wherever she travels. YAWDI's is a collection of unique internationally inspired condiments that are versatile, consisting of all-natural premium ingredients, without compromise on taste.



Lisa Hallsworth, P.Eng.
 Chief Vision Officer
 Rillea Technologies

After spending 30 years in the chemical manufacturing industry, Rillea Technologies was founded in 2016 by Lisa and her husband. As a chemical engineer, Lisa learned that many people didn't have the resources to manage chemical safety. This led her on a journey to create a platform to help individuals manage chemical safety for any kind of facility. It's amazing where you will find chemicals in today's world.



Brigitte Gall
 VP of Business Development & Marketing
 The Occurrence

Located in Haliburton, Ontario, TheOccurrence is a Canadian owned and operated jigsaw puzzle manufacturing company. Their products are designed, cut, and boxed in Ontario - no manufacturing 'partners' outside of Canada for them. TheOccurrence's work is informed and inspired by their passion for Canadian geology, geography, and our collective cultural history.



Rosemary Cescolini
 Office Manager
 Royal Door Ltd.

Since 1975, Royal Door has been delivering a reputation for excellence and quality that is as solid as the doors they produce. From five door styles, the company has now expanded to offer over 150 door styles. Rosemary entered the family business in 1995 to help support the company's growing success.



Lola Adeyemi
 Founder/Chief Souper Woman
 It's Souper

Founded by Lola in 2018, It's Souper's Afro-Fusion Gourmet Soup and Sauce line was inspired by the fusion of cultures that exists in Canada, a yearning for authentic flavours from Africa, and a desire to share it with her community. Their mission is to make delicious tasting recipes made with high-quality ingredients and exotic flavors that meet the demands of today's diverse world.

What does International Women's Day mean to you?

Veneise: International Women's Day is a **celebration of the past, present, and future**. We're celebrating those that paved the way for us, and those that are continuing to pave the way. Even through building my business and my achievements, it's not lost on me that there are many times when I look around and see that there's still not people that look like me. Sometimes I'm the only female face, and more often the only black female face. I'm really trying to create a more equitable and inclusive society.

Natacha: This International Women's Day feels different to me because I'm sensing a shift towards brighter days and an acknowledgement of the strength and resilience that women innately have. The pandemic, although extremely tough for many, has demonstrated just how remarkable we are at juggling many tasks at home while simultaneously making the world a better place. I am seeing this everywhere I look: the woman-powered executive management at my national distributor, the caregivers working tirelessly in health care, the whip-smart female political leaders who are pushing the needle forward to help Canadians...I could go on. All this to say, as the mother of a daughter this day **represents the hope for a future where we are all treated equally**.

Lola: For me, being a black woman, I always have to constantly prove myself and show that I'm worthy for my voice to be heard. International Women's Day is a day not just to recognize the accomplishments of women, but to also **educate other people**. I love the fact that this day is recognized, but more focused on the education element, so that people can realize, wow, women are doing big things.

Rosemary: Just the mention of the day gives me goosebumps. Not only is it a global celebration of social, political, economic, and educational gains that women have made worldwide, **it's dear to my heart**. As a woman in Canada, I feel like International Women's Day is celebrated the whole year round. As a child, I was given lots of encouragement to get a good and solid education not only at home, but also in the school system, which allowed me to think, hey, I can do whatever I want to do.

What made you choose your career path?

Lola: For a long time, entrepreneurship wasn't my pathway. I came to Canada as an international student, finished university, and started working. Canada is a country that really welcomes immigrants, so I got a work permit, and my focus was to become an executive in the corporate world. I became a Senior Consultant with the City of Toronto, and everything was great. But I **started to feel a passion for starting my own company** that was so overwhelming that I had to answer the call.

Brigitte: Because of my film and television background, I was the product. When I had my two girls, and I had to make the choice, do I go back into that industry or do we start this puzzle company? I felt really proud of the fact that I went, you know what, I can do that, for sure. I love puzzles. I love what we make. I love that it's Canadian images, and that it's a Canadian company. I can manufacture that, I can sell that, and I can make that happen. For the first time ***I'm running a company, and it's super empowering, fun, and phenomenally hard*** at the same time.

Rosemary: I was a high school teacher, and it came down to the lack of freedom in the teaching profession. I shared this thought with my husband and my in-laws, and they said, you know, what? The business is growing - why don't you just come in? My first reaction was that I didn't know a thing about manufacturing. I didn't even know how to use a tape measure. My parents weren't business individuals. I had zero skills in this realm of work. My father-in-law, and my husband said, ***if you're willing to learn, we're more than willing to teach you.*** And the rest is history. Everyone in the business took their time to teach me and answer my questions – even until this day.

Natacha: *I think manufacturing chose me.* As a product formulator I always thought the path forward was to conceptualize products and hand them to a co-packer to re-produce. Over time I began to realize that the way my team worked created a much higher quality product than any co-packer would ever be willing to do, so we've gradually moved to in-house manufacturing.

Veneise: My path to manufacturing was not a straight line. I don't even know if I necessarily chose it. My journey to manufacturing began because I've always had a passion for food. When I realized it was my dream, ***I had to develop the confidence to take that leap*** and I was determined to find my way and a place in the sector. Since then, I've learned that manufacturing is an evolving industry, and the potential for continued growth is just enormous.

Lisa: I think the stars were aligned for me to end up in engineering. I grew up on a farm, and it's a great meritocracy. Regardless of gender, you have to pitch in. When I was in school, I was doing pretty well, and my physics teacher suggested I should consider a career in engineering. As a profession, I had no idea what engineers did. But then I met a female engineer and I was sold. After 30 years working on the technical side, I was led to create Rillea Technologies.

What are the biggest barriers you have faced and how did you overcome them or are overcoming them?

Natacha: This year's theme for International Women's Day is 'Break the Bias' which I stand firmly behind because my experience of working with male-dominated co-packers has been the biggest barrier. I've been doing this for 10 years now and one of the skills that I've developed out of necessity is gauging the cooperation I will receive from a male supplier/banker/web developer...etc. and identifying their biases in

working with a woman-owned company. ***It's a skill that no one talks about*** but that every woman hones and utilizes in her career to get the job done.

Lisa: Being in engineering at the University of Waterloo, you start working in engineering jobs right away. So definitely, I had faced gender-based issues, certainly inappropriate behavior from male colleagues. And for the most part, I just ignored, but I learned pretty early in my career, that that wasn't necessarily the best approach. I have come across many opportunities, where I wouldn't want my kids working in certain environments. And it's really hard and uncomfortable to try to change it. But in the end, if you can ***find the strength and the courage*** to make those changes, you find that not just you feel better, but your colleagues feel better as well.

Veneise: My entrepreneurial journey has had a steep learning curve. Sometimes I wish that I had a black mentor or female mentor, who understood the landscape, and could help me to understand what I'm going to be going through. To be quite honest, ***I'm still looking for mentors.*** If you have a dream, sometimes you need someone to help guide you, and make sure that you don't give up on your dreams.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Lisa: Relax a bit. I remember being so focused on proving that I deserved to be in that job. I would say, find confidence in yourself and trust your intuition. ***Find really good mentors*** and try to form strong and lasting relationships with them. If you're feeling insecure, go to your mentors.

Rosemary: If I could turn back, I would probably have had a different career path. It might not have been manufacturing, but it could have been a trade like an electrician or maybe even a plumber. ***I love the fact that I would have full control over something.*** Like being able to be an electrician and wire a whole house from scratch. That's such an incredible accomplishment.

Lola: ***Just keep going*** - the struggles are going to come, but you're going to overcome them, and you're going to be an inspiration to people. My younger self dropped out of medical school and was so scared. I felt like I had disappointed everyone, and I wasn't sure where I was going. But right now, seeing the inspiration that this brand has given to other people, like other African immigrants who message me and tell me how inspiring it is to see another African brand in stores, I would never turn back.

Brigitte: I would tell her to be braver. Don't disregard that little intuition in your gut, that says, I really want to do this thing. ***And find a mentor.*** If you can't be brave, then find somebody who's doing the thing that you think you want to do and become friends with them or ask them if they can mentor you. And be brave about it. Don't

be shy because people want to help. Oftentimes I find that they're really honoured that you would ask.

Why would you encourage young women to enter careers in manufacturing?

Rosemary: I have a daughter and she's in the manufacturing industry too. When I look at her interacting with clients and I can see how happy she is. I asked her once - wouldn't you have been happier working in an accounting office? Her response was, 'no, I wouldn't change this for the world.' When it comes down to it, **the opportunities in manufacturing are limitless.** There's so many aspects and you'll never get bored. There's also flexibility – I set my own hours, and the pay is incredible. I've been in manufacturing for 30 years and I'm just getting started. I wake up every day and I'm excited. What am I going to create today? It's a recipe for happiness. That's what a career in manufacturing would be.

Lisa: Making products needed by society is purposeful, necessary, and rewarding work. **There really is something for everyone in manufacturing.** From the food industry to the cosmetic industry, the medical industry, and so much more – there are so many opportunities to do purposeful work in manufacturing. We need women to be part of this transformative change that we're going through and help shepherd the change with a keen eye on climate change, safety, and all those things that kind of come naturally to us. Manufacturing is such a rewarding place to work and offers so many invaluable learning opportunities.

Lola: A lot of times, women are the decision makers when it comes to purchasing for households. Even for organizations in the corporate world, we make a lot of purchasing decisions. We're the ones who know what is needed. We have the ideas; we know where the gaps are and ask ourselves why someone else hasn't created this yet. **If you realize there's a gap in the market, create it** – invent that product, create that solution. I really encourage women to do that and not wait for somebody else. Even if you're not an inventor, even if you don't have the funds, find a way to pitch your idea and get some funding to create it yourself.

Veneise: We have a long way to go when it comes to encouraging young girls to be able to tap into their explorative nature and seek career paths in sectors like manufacturing. **There's so much room for all of us in this sector.** I have a daughter and I encourage her to explore manufacturing. I encourage her to explore STEM subjects. It's so important that we help young women recognize all their possibilities, and that countless possibilities in manufacturing do exist for them.

Brigitte: I would encourage young women to enter manufacturing because it's awesome, empowering, and exciting. It's so unlike the traditional norms that we think of for rules for women. Oftentimes, **manufacturing will take you to places you had no idea you would end up.** And there's lots of room for growth and a

whole new world of opportunities. It's so important to open yourself up to career opportunities in the trades.

Natacha: The way we make every single physical item on the planet needs to be re-imagined for a better world and future for humanity. Our male counterparts spear-headed the industrial revolution...**now it's our turn.** Just watch and see!

To learn more about Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME's) commitment to supporting, promoting, and inspiring women to pursue careers in manufacturing, and discover how to get involved, visit womeninmanufacturing.ca.